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Reply to a Statement of Proceedings of  
London Yearly Meeting. 1856

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REPLY

TO

"A STATEMENT OF THE PROCEEDINGS

OF

LONDON YEARLY MEETING,

HELD IN LONDON, 1855.

IN REFERENCE TO

THE DIVISION IN OHIO YEARLY MEETING."



AUBURN:  
WILLIAM J. MOSES.  
1856.



REPLY

TO

"A STATEMENT OF THE PROCEEDINGS

OF

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At a Meeting for Sufferings of New York Yearly Meeting of Friends, held at Poplar Ridge, Cayuga Co., N. Y., 5th mo., 24th, 1856, this Meeting having noticed with deep concern a "Statement of the Proceedings of London Yearly Meeting in 1855," the tendency of which, in its apprehension, is misleading: and feeling that something of the nature of a Reply was called for, for the clearing of Truth, the Meeting felt engaged, after due deliberation, to issue the following Reply, which was directed to be printed and distributed.

Taken from the Minutes.

JAMES D. OTIS, Clerk.

## REPLY

*To "A Statement of the Proceedings of London Yearly Meeting, held in London, 1855, in reference to the division in Ohio Yearly Meeting."*

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It is not because we delight in controversy that we take the pen, but we feel drawn by an impression of duty to make a few remarks on a document issued by the Yearly Meeting of London, relative to the proceedings of that Meeting in 1855, in reference to the division in the Yearly Meeting of Ohio, which was re-published by that body which meets in the city of New York claiming our name, the 24th of 10th mo., 1855, in order that the Quarterly, Monthly and Preparative Meetings, and also the families of Friends, might be furnished with it. In attempting a reply to this document, it is with a desire that we may be instrumental in suggesting some ideas to a portion of our readers, at least, which may tend to unravel the covering that this production is calculated to spread over the true state of things ; so that for the relief of their own minds, and their prosperity in the best things, our dear inquiring Friends may take up with nothing short of the Truth in its primeval clearness, as it was labored for by our beloved ancient worthies.

In a minute of the Yearly Meeting, appended to the "Statement," we find this paragraph :



“In thus forwarding the document, we fee engaged to give forth a word of caution to our members, that they seek to maintain a watchful, quiet mind ; guarding against the receiving and circulating rumors, calculated, however unintentionally, to foster a party spirit, and *endeavoring to cherish that candor and charity which so highly becomes the Christian. As a watchword against any thing tending to divide or separate amongst us, may they remember the language of the Apostle—‘ Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.’*”

In perusing the document, we think that we find, in the spirit and tenor of it, a deplorable deficiency of that candor and charity of which they speak. We can hardly suppose that the writers can be ignorant of the rise and progress of this difficulty in Society ; and that unsound doctrines, promulgated in England, was the main cause of all the separations which they so much regret. While they keep out of view unsound writings existing in Society, which almost if not quite as palpably diverge from the faith of our beloved predecessors as did those of Elias Hicks ; denouncing all as indulging in a party spirit who honestly oppose them and retain their integrity in the Truth, till separations have been produced, as they were under like circumstances in 1827 and 1828 ; recommending a quiet mind in the midst of these open violations of the true spirit of Christianity ; and they are inclined to rest here, without going deeper into the merits of the present controversy, we would emphatically recommend the Apostolic language, which they quote, to their own consideration : “ Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” And in candor, and, we trust, without any violation of that Christian charity which they recommend, we would ask them to consider whether their situation does not somewhat resemble those formerly that sat in Moses’ seat, “ who bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and laid them upon men’s shoulders ;

but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers." In the "Statement" they say:

"It is a principle with this Yearly Meeting that the several American Yearly Meetings with which it is in correspondence are independent bodies, whose deliberations and decisions in the exercise of the discipline towards their own members and subordinate Meetings are to be regarded as final and not to be interfered with. In 1846, this Meeting accordingly decided that it could not hold any correspondence with those individuals who, in 1845, had separated themselves from New England Yearly Meeting, and who, together with several of the disowned members of that Yearly Meeting, had attempted to form themselves into a Yearly Meeting."

When the Separations of 1827 and 1828 took place in most of the Yearly Meetings on the American continent, the decision in reference to which division it was proper for London Yearly Meeting to embrace as brethren, was made under consideration of which body adhered to the ancient doctrines of Friends, the only safe ground for action in such cases: and in what manner London Yearly Meeting has come to the conclusion that the body in New England with which they correspond, hold the principles entire as they were held by ancient Friends, and that their recent conduct has given no just cause for suspicion to the contrary, we are not informed; and they leave us equally uninstructed in reference to their decision respecting the smaller body in New England with which they refuse to connect themselves. They do not show us, by any of its acts, that it has given ground for the supposition that its members are not sound in the accredited doctrines of our Society. But according to the principle which they designed to enforce in the above quotation, how could London Yearly Meeting, in 1828, acknowledge the few in Baltimore Yearly Meeting which withdrew from the seceders in doctrine that then controlled its action?

Without showing us any real ground on which they base their highly important decision between two bodies, each claiming to be the true Yearly Meeting, they appear to proceed with as much confidence as if they had effected a deliberate and elaborate investigation respecting the difficulties in New England. Our ancient Friends were ever ready to give a candid reason for every action, and to take great pains to meet the objections of their opponents, minutely and fairly, that they might be instrumental in removing all doubts and fears concerning their faith and movements, for the good of honest inquirers.

And after so little valid reason for their conclusion in the New England troubles, and after all that they have written, leaving so great an uncertainty in respect to the propriety of their decision, they go on after this manner, we believe, with unwarrantable temerity, sadly deepening themselves in their wrong position :

“ Our epistolary correspondence with the Yearly Meeting of New England has continued unbroken ; the certificates of ministers from that Meeting travelling in this land, have been uniformly authenticated by our Meeting for Sufferings, and recorded by this Meeting and its subordinate Meetings, and these gospel messengers have been received with brotherly openness, and sped on their way. Proper guards have at the same time been placed on the intrusion of any who were connected with the body that had separated from that Yearly Meeting, as appears by the correspondence between our Meeting for Sufferings and that of New England, and by the minutes of our Meeting for Sufferings, read at our last Yearly Meeting, in reference to the visit of an individual so circumstanced to this land.”

In the succeeding paragraph, they speak of Friends of Ohio Yearly Meeting, under views and feelings which they fear have resulted in a division within its limits, pursuing a different course, declining to correspond with New England Yearly Meeting, and in various ways manifesting

sympathy in a greater or less degree with the body who, they say, "have separated from it:" and further state, that in their epistle to Ohio Yearly Meeting, they "commended" to their "dear Friends there, the maintenance of a correspondence with all the other Yearly Meetings" on this side of the water, and expressed their "sense of the value of guarding against a *spirit of jealousy and distrust*."

Now although it appears that Friends of Ohio were advised by London Yearly Meeting to correspond with all the Yearly Meetings on this continent, without reference to their honest convictions in regard to the propriety of a contrary course, London Yearly Meeting gave this advice without going sufficiently deep into the matter to remove fears which many members in Ohio have entertained, that the Yearly Meeting in New England, with which they refused to correspond, is not the legitimate one. While London is thus deficient of a full and fair examination into the difficulties in New England, how can it be satisfied that what the writers of the "Statement" consider a "*spirit of jealousy and distrust*" in Friends of Ohio may not be, on the contrary, a *sufficient and honest conviction* that the body in New England, with whom they decline correspondence, is defective of the true position and character of a Yearly Meeting of Friends?

And although we have no evidence that London Yearly Meeting has ever attempted to show that of Ohio that they were mistaken, by reaching to the root of the difficulty to remove their scruples in reference to epistolary intercourse with the larger body, and also to convince them that their unity with the smaller body is spurious and ill founded, yet, in the next paragraph, they lament the countenance given by Ohio Yearly Meeting to the attendance of members of this body, who, they allege, have separated from the Yearly Meeting of New England, and whom, they say, upon the principles above referred to, they cannot

consider "as any longer forming a part of our religious society."

In the following paragraph they advert to a "desire consistently to carry out the principles of Christian order, which," they say, "have regulated our own course of action," &c., and that they had been led "to accept the epistle signed by Jonathan Binns, under the conviction that the Friends whom he represents have been, and are, acting most in accordance with the course which this Meeting adopted in 1846, and which it has ever since pursued." Here there is no reference made to which part in Ohio has the strongest claim to a consistent course of conduct, in its endeavors to maintain the principles of Friends inviolate; but allusion is made to "disorganizing tendencies" which, they assert, "have so painfully manifested themselves, not only in Ohio, but also in several other of the American Yearly Meetings," without defining them, that we can see the root or source from which they spring. Do they arise from the support of unsound principles or the promoters of them? or is there no cause for fear that unsound views upon some cardinal points of doctrine have been cherished and protected, while the authors of them have been permitted to pass up and down in Society, by the aid and approval of their Friends? Or do they entirely arise, as the authors of this Document would seem to wish their readers to believe, in a mistaken apprehension that any unsoundness has existed to elicit fears, and that a spirit of distrust and groundless suspicion has given rise to present difficulties in America? That the latter is not the case, we should think common candor, which is necessary for a moral reputation amongst men, would compel them to admit.\* But they proceed:

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\*See an Appeal for the ancient doctrines of the Religious Society of Friends, published by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1847. Also, An Examination of the Memoirs and Writings of Joseph John Gurney, by William Hodgson, Jr., issued the present year.

"In a question of so much *delicacy and difficulty* as the decision which of two bodies to recognize, (where the separation does not profess to rest on a difference in fundamental doctrines,) it is a satisfaction to us to know that the step which we have taken is in harmony with the judgment of a very large proportion of our dear Friends on the American continent, comprising three out of the four other Yearly Meetings who have already had the subject brought before them."

It is well known that the sympathy manifested towards the smaller body in New England, by a large proportion of Ohio Yearly Meeting, was on account of the belief that that body owed its present peculiar and tried position to its faithful support of the doctrines of our Society; and that this must have been the basis of a conscientious dissent from the advice of London Yearly Meeting already noticed, to resume correspondence with all the Yearly Meetings on this continent. That they have the judgment of three out of four of the other Yearly Meetings that have already had the subject before them, in their decision, will add but little to their consolation, unless that judgment has the authority of Truth, having the seal of Divine approbation upon it; for any thing short of this, the Great Head of the Church can revoke at his holy pleasure, however popular a conclusion may be. When Friends first came forth, they were unpopular by what was considered the Established Church; and if Friends in the compact have so much degenerated of latter time as not to be alarmed at the intrusion of doctrines in their midst peculiar to that then persecuting Church, but instead are willing to foster and conceal them from view and interruption, is it any wonder that those who desire to support our ancient principles should be unpopular by most of the Yearly Meetings?

In the next paragraph, they speak of feeling themselves "called upon to act with decision and without delay in de-

termining the course " for themselves to take, by at once corresponding with the meeting of which Jonathan Binns is clerk, "endeavoring to uphold their hands," &c. Here the query again arises, whether they have been deliberate and cautious enough on a question which they admit to be one of "*delicacy and difficulty*," before they ventured to strengthen the hands of either part, lest they should uphold the actual seceders in every sense that the term is applied by the different bodies at the present day, and thus assuredly be found among the armies of the aliens, fighting against the true Israel of God. In the succeeding paragraph they say :

"Oh that we could so effectually plead with those of our Friends in Ohio, with whom we do not now correspond, as to induce them in love for the Truth, and for the unity of the brethren, to lay aside all that may have tended to separate them from full Christian intercourse with the body of Friends in New England and in this country."

It is incumbent upon those who desire to promote "love for the Truth, and the unity of the brethren," and to plead effectually in this matter, to come down to the real or supposed origin of the difficulty, and thus endeavor to remove every stone of stumbling out of the way of their brethren ; and if in the course of this candid and righteous labor, they should find that their own remissness or unfaithfulness has been promotive of the troubles in America, in any respect, to be willing to take that part of the burden and responsibility upon themselves which properly belongs to them. To plead availingly, example must dignify precept. Had timely and proper care been taken, when unsound doctrines first appeared in England, and a salutary check been given, whence would have proceeded the troubles and divisions in America, which the writers of the "Statement " so much deplore ? The axe must be laid at the root of the corrupt tree in Society, before the divisions and separations, with their evil tendencies, can be stayed, and a

reconciliation and re-union effected. A little after, they speak of the difficulties produced by mutual jealousy and division, contrasting them with the brotherly interchange of membership "and of every privilege incident to it, which was so beautifully established amongst us, as one great family in the Truth," &c. This state of things perhaps we as deeply regret; but we believe had all parts of the Society faithfully maintained the true doctrines of the gospel, as revived and promulgated by our forefathers, and their attachment to them unbroken, practically holding them forth to others, not only in precept, but by lives in unison therewith, we should still be "one great family in the Truth," and enjoy the privileges throughout Society which only in that condition can be realized. In page 13 they say:

"Never before, if we except the great doctrinal secession of 1827 and 1828, have we had presented to us, as a Yearly Meeting, such distressing evidence of the want of harmony and mutual confidence, and of the wide-spread tendency to separation and disorganization, on a smaller or larger scale, in different parts of the Society of Friends in America."

Here there is not the slightest allusion to unsound doctrine, as promotive of our present afflictive trials: they appear to be kept entirely out of view, as well as in all other parts of the "Statement"; and this paragraph is so managed as to imply that our present difficulties have arisen without any reference to doctrinal errors. Whether this is correct, we appeal, in confidence, to all honest Friends; and must regret here, as in other places in this document, that the authors of it should sink below common fairness and frankness. Further on they say:

"We desire not to shrink from bearing our part, as Christian brethren, both in sorrow and in the humiliation of the day."



Perhaps, should this be practically manifested hereafter, by the several Yearly Meetings which have refused to correspond with those who have continued steadfast to the one unchanging faith of the Society, operating sufficiently to become a godly sorrow to repentance and amendment, "those American Yearly Meetings," of which they speak as now separated one from another, "*though professing the same Christian principles,*" may yet be re-united in outward fellowship. But the inward fellowship must exist in the Truth, or the outward fellowship, like a body without vitality, will assuredly decay: and the inward fellowship is marred, when the "*one faith*" which binds together is forsaken.

In page 14 they remark, they have not spoken of the separations amongst Friends in America subsequently to the secession of 1828; as connected with any difference in matters of faith, and conclude the paragraph with saying:

"Yet we deem it not unsuitable, on such an occasion as the present, to declare for ourselves our own unshaken attachment to all the great and glorious truths of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as set forth in Holy Scripture."

It is the omission to speak of the separations amongst Friends in America, as connected with the difference in matters of faith, which, in our opinion, makes the "Statement" so superficial, and short of coming to the true condition of things in Society. We believe there is no room for allegations of unsoundness against those portions of Society in America which are in sympathy with the smaller body in New England, for it is the desire to preserve the principles of Friends pure, which has brought them into their present situation. This is cause of thankfulness for those suffering individuals of that small Yearly Meeting, and such as are now fully and fairly in connection with them. We do not see, however, that the

latter part of the paragraph conveys any thing like a definite exposition of their faith, for the Episcopalians and Presbyterians, were their belief called in question, would doubtless severally declare their "unshaken attachment to all the great and glorious truths of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as set forth in Holy Scripture." On the 15th page we find the following language :

"After having thus stood by our brethren in America in the breach, when they were assailed, it has grieved us that imputations of holding unsound doctrines, and of departing from the faith of our forefathers, should have been so often made against Friends in this country, by some under our name in that land. For the sake of our own Society in England, for the sake of all under the name of Friends throughout the United States of America, for the sake of those blessed doctrines and principles which, under the power of the Lord's Spirit, we were raised to support, but, above all, for the love of Christ our Savior—we entreat that henceforward all may desist from these insinuations, which tend but to weaken, to divide, and to scatter."

Far be it from us to represent London Yearly Meeting, or any other body, in a different position than their own actions and writings have necessarily placed them ; but while they continue silent in regard to unsound publications amongst themselves, of a conspicuous character, from which our troubles in America have grown, and while only they continue to reflect censure on Friends who feel themselves conscientiously bound to hold on their way, and not to be implicated in the countenance or promotion of unsoundness, what must be the inevitable conclusion of the thinking part of the community respecting their uncompromising adherence to the ancient principles ? Entreaty is made in this paragraph, as if they were sensible that they lay open to the just imputation of their brethren in America. They nowhere in the "Statement" repudiate

the unsound writings which have arisen in England ; therefore, how can they have disentangled themselves, by this document, at least, from the justness of the insinuations from which they desire so much to be relieved ? To those who feel themselves bound to the law and the testimony, before any other consideration, the present is a serious time : such we believe there are, who, for their lives, are afraid to turn from a direct course in the Truth as it was held by our beloved predecessors, being willing rather to be numbered with transgressors—and can neither turn to the right hand nor to the left, let the consequence be what it may ; but who find it necessary to look alone to the “ Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength,” for protection, and to uphold them in their course, that they might finish it with joy. Some in every generation have been found who have kept their standing on the Rock of Ages, while the billows of affliction have passed over them ; whose sustenance was the bread of life, and who were under the special protection of the Great Head of the Church, and fed in due season. Such now we would tenderly exhort to cleave to the pearl of great price, who from a faithful abiding in their tents know something of the troubles of the day ; keep steadfast to your first love, and marvelous deliverances will be shown you ; mountains will be leveled in your way, and valleys rise for your feet ; stony places will be made smooth, and the excellence of Truth will more and more unfold in your experience, and be very precious indeed and comfortable in your possession, more valuable than gold, far exceeding all price.

With the writers of the “ Statement,” we disapprove of “ the circulation of pamphlets and writings, advocating, *in a party spirit*,” any views whatever ; but at the same time, we believe it now to be obligatory as at the early period of our Society, under the authority of the never-failing Helper of his people, openly to espouse the blessed

Truth, and to tear away the covering which some would spread over it. Our ancient Friends were industrious in meeting all the objections of their opponents which were likely to obscure the brightness of those excellent gospel Truths which seemed in that day to be remarkably unfolded to inquiring minds ; and it is no marvel that they will have to be maintained by the same devotion, the same exercises of spirit and the same singleness of heart and purpose which rendered our forefathers a peculiar people, zealous of good works. As there is a growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we find that we cannot revel in self-pleasing gratifications, but shall have to realize what the dear Master said to Peter—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." The apostles, with those of the true faith since their day, were often led through straits and difficulties with a despised few, and were obliged to be industrious according to the inspeaking word of life, which has ever been attendant to lead, to encourage, to comfort and to strengthen, in every extremity into which it has pleased Infinite Wisdom to bring them. And so in the present day, an entire dedication to the cause of Truth, as advocated by early Friends, requires zeal and devotion, with the mind girded and prepared for the work, single and detached from the things of time ; for "no man that warreth entangleth himself with the things of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." So that all productions advocating, in clearness, gospel truths, as delivered by our early Friends, under Divine authority, we must consider useful ; and we believe those who venture to oppose and suppress them, assume a fearful responsibility ; but those publica-

tions which tend to lower the holy standard, to lay waste and impair the Truth in its purity, we wish ever to oppose and condemn, believing the awful warning, "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

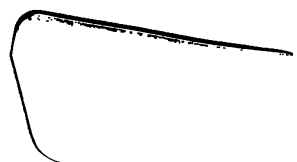
In conclusion, we would tenderly exhort the writers of the "Statement," and others like minded with them, to endeavor to sink deeper in their minds, that they might be favored to reach the root of the grievance, and see whether London Yearly Meeting has not something important to do in practically setting the example of deep searching of heart, on account of the divisions of Reuben; and if in true compassion they could feel for their brethren who have experienced their lives, as bound up in a testimony, against those who would remove our ancient land-marks, and so spoil our beauty that no comeliness is likely to be left in us as a people, then the truth might again be verified—"He that loveth his brother, dwelleth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." In this heavenly disposition we see things as they really are, and it will lead us to put away all things which tend to divide in Jacob and to scatter in Israel. If unsoundness exists, it will induce us, for the good of the brethren and for the peace of Society, frankly and specifically to take it up, and to testify against it; and this step, should it be taken now, might lead to others productive of a reconciliation of the different Yearly Meetings in America, to our mutual joy and rejoicing in the Lord; but the probe must go to bottom of the wound before a true soundness can be restored, and before we can expect to realize this desire of the Psalmist—"Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."

*presented by Anna Perce 5. 29. 77*

*for C. C. Cresson 6. 6. 77*









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